



'My Patient, Hitler'

A Memoir of Hitler's Jewish Physician

Eduard Bloch

"My Patient, Hitler," by Dr. Eduard Bloch "as told to J. D. Ratcliff," originally appeared in two parts in the March 15 and March 22, 1941, issues of *Collier's* magazine. In those pre-television days, *Collier's* was one of the most influential and widely-read periodicals in the United States. Regarded by serious historians as an important primary historical source about Hitler's youth, this essay is cited, for example, in the bibliography and reference notes of John Toland's acclaimed biography, *Adolf Hitler* (Doubleday, 1976). It is also cited as a source in Robert Payne's study, *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler* (Praeger, 1973) and in Louis Snyder's *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (McGraw Hill, 1976). While frankly describing the devastating impact of Hitler's anti-Jewish measures on his own life and career, Dr. Bloch also writes about the teenage Hitler with an honesty and sensitivity that would be almost unthinkable in any large-circulation American magazine today. The complete text of the original two-part essay, including original subtitles, is reprinted here, with only a few minor additions in brackets.

— The Editor

We were three days out of Lisbon bound west for New York. The storm on Saturday had been bad, but on Sunday the sea had subsided. A little before eleven o'clock that night our ship, the small Spanish liner Marques de Comillas, got orders to stop. British control officers aboard a trawler wanted to examine the passengers. Everyone was told to line up in the main lounge.

Four British officers, wearing life jackets, entered. Without comment they worked their way down the line, scrutinizing passports. There was a feeling of tenseness. Many of those aboard the ship were fleeing; they thought they had made good their escape from Europe once anchor was hoisted in Lisbon. Now? No one knew. Perhaps some of us would be taken off the ship.

Finally it was my turn. The officer in charge took my passport, glanced at it and looked up, smiling. "You were Hitler's physician, weren't you?" he asked. This was correct. It would also have been correct for him to add that I am a Jew.

I knew Adolf Hitler as a boy and as a young man. I treated him many times and was intimately familiar with the modest surroundings in which he grew to manhood. I attended, in her final illness, the person nearer and dearer to him than all others -- his mother.

Most biographers -- both sympathetic and unsympathetic -- have avoided the youth of Adolf Hitler. The unsympathetic ones have done this of necessity. They could lay their hands on only the most meager facts. The official party biographies have skipped over this period because of the dictator's wishes. Why this abnormal sensitivity about his youth? I do not know. There are no scandalous chapters which Hitler might wish to hide, unless one goes back over a hundred years to the birth of his father. Some biographers say that Alois Hitler was an illegitimate child. I cannot speak for the accuracy of this statement.

What of those early years in Linz, Austria, where Hitler spent his formative years? What kind of boy was he? What kind of a life did he lead? It is of these things that we shall speak here.

When Adolf Hitler was Thirteen

First, I might introduce myself. I was born in Frauenburg, a tiny village in southern Bohemia which, in the course of my lifetime, had been under three flags: Austrian, Czechoslovakian and German. I am sixty-nine years old. I studied medicine in Prague, then joined the Austrian army as a military doctor.

In 1899 I was ordered to Linz, capital of Upper Austria, and the third largest city in the country. When I completed my army service in 1901 I decided to remain in Linz and practice medicine.

As a city, Linz has always been as quiet and reserved as Vienna was gay and noisy. In the period of which we are about to speak – when Adolf Hitler was a boy of 13 [actually, 14] – Linz was a city of 80,000 people. My consultation rooms and home were in the same house, an ancient baroque structure on Landstrasse, the main thoroughfare of the city.

The Hitler family moved to Linz in 1903, because, I believe, of the good schools there. The family background is well known. Alois Schicklgruber Hitler was the son of a poor peasant girl. When he was old enough to work he got a job as a cobbler's apprentice, worked his way into the government service and became a customs inspector at Braunau, a tiny frontier town between Bavaria and Austria. Braunau is fifty miles from Linz. At fifty-six Alois Hitler became eligible for a pension and retired. Proud of his own success, he was anxious for his son to enter government service. Young Adolf violently opposed the idea. He would be an artist. Father and son fought over this while the mother, Klara Hitler, tried to maintain peace.

As long as he lived Alois Hitler persevered in trying to shape his son's destiny to his own desires. His son would have the education which had been denied him; an education which would secure him a good government job. So Father Alois prepared to leave the hamlet of Braunau for the city of Linz. Because of his government service, he would not be required to pay the full tuition for his son at the *Realschule*. With all this in mind he bought a small farm in Leonding, a Linz suburb.

The family was rather large. In later life Adolf has so overshadowed the others that they are, for the better part, forgotten. There was half-brother Alois, whom I never met. He left home at an early age, got a job as a waiter in London and later opened his own restaurant in Berlin. He was never friendly with his younger brother.

Then there was Paula, the oldest of the girls. She later married Herr Rubal, an official in the tax bureau in Linz. Later still, after her husband's death and her brother's rise to power, she went to Berchtesgaden to become house-keeper at Hitler's villa. Sister Klara for a while managed a restaurant for Jewish students at the University of Vienna; and sister Angela, youngest of the girls, married a Professor Hamitsch at Dresden, where she still lives.

A Job for Frau Hitler

The family had barely settled in their new home outside of Linz when Alois, the father, died suddenly from an apoplectic stroke.

At the time Frau Hitler was in her early forties. She was a simple, modest, kindly woman. She was tall, had brownish hair which she kept neatly plaited, and a long, oval face with beautifully expressive gray-blue eyes. She was desperately worried about the responsibilities thrust upon her by her husband's death. Alois, twenty-three years her senior, had always managed the family. Now the job was hers.

It was readily apparent that son Adolf was too young and altogether too fragile to become a farmer. So her best move seemed to be to sell the place and rent a small apartment. This she did, soon after her husband's death. With the proceeds of this sale and the small pension which came to her because of her husband's government position, she managed to hold her family together.

In a small town in Austria poverty doesn't force upon one the indignities that it does in a large city. There are no slums and no serious overcrowding. I do not know the exact income of the Hitler family, but being familiar with the scale of government pensions I should estimate it at \$25 a month. This small sum allowed them to live quietly and decently – unnoticed little people in an out-of-the-way town.

Their apartment consisted of three small rooms in the two-story house at No. 9 Bluetenstrasse, which is across the Danube from the main portion of Linz. Its windows gave an excellent view of the mountains.

My predominant impression of the simple furnished apartment was its cleanliness. It glistened; not a speck of dust on the chairs or tables, not a stray fleck of mud on the scrubbed floor, not a smudge on the panes in the windows. Frau Hitler was a superb housekeeper.

The Hitlers had only a few friends. One stood out above the others; the widow of the postmaster who lived in the same house.

The limited budget allowed not even the smallest extravagance. We had the usual provincial opera in Linz: not good, and not bad. Those who would hear the best went to Vienna. Seats in the gallery of our theater, the *Schauspielhaus*, sold for the equivalent of 10 to 15 cents in American money. Yet occupying one of these seats to hear an indifferent troupe sing Lohengrin was such a memorable occasion that Hitler records it in *Mein Kampf*!

For the most part the boy's recreations were limited to those things which were free: walks in the mountains, a swim in the Danube, a free band concert. He read extensively and was particularly fascinated by stories about American Indians. He devoured the books of James Fenimore Cooper, and the German writer Karl May – who never visited America and never saw an Indian.

The family diet was, of necessity, simple and rugged. Food was cheap and plentiful in Linz; and the Hitler family ate much the same diet as other people in their circumstance. Meat would be served perhaps twice a week. Most of the meals they sat down to consisted of cabbage or potato soup, bread, dumplings and a pitcher of pear and apple cider.

For clothing, they wore the rough woolen cloth we call *Loden*. Adolf, of course, dressed in the uniform of all small boys: leather shorts, embroidered suspenders, a small green hat with a feather in its band.

A Remarkable Mother Love

What kind of boy was Adolf Hitler? Many biographers have put him down as harsh-voiced, defiant, untidy; as a young ruffian who personified all that is unattractive. This simply is not true. As a youth he was quiet, well-mannered and neatly dressed.

He records that at the age of fifteen he regarded himself as a political revolutionary. Possibly. But let us look at Adolf Hitler as he impressed people about him, not as he impressed himself.

He was tall, sallow, old for his age. He was neither robust nor sickly. Perhaps "frail looking" would best describe him. His eyes – inherited from his mother – were large, melancholy and thoughtful. To a very large extent this boy lived within himself. What dreams he dreamed I do not know.

Outwardly, his love for his mother was his most striking feature. While he was not a "mother's boy" in the usual sense, I have never witnessed a closer attachment. Some insist that this love verged on the pathological. As a former intimate of the family, I do not believe this is true.

Klara Hitler adored her son, the youngest of the family. She allowed him his own way wherever possible. His father had insisted that he become an official. He rebelled and won his mother to his side. He soon tired of school, so his mother allowed him to drop his studies.

All friends of the family know how Frau Hitler encouraged his boyish efforts to become an artist; at what cost to herself one may guess. Despite their poverty, she permitted him to reject a job which was offered in the post office, so that he could continue his painting. She admired his water colors and his sketches of the countryside. Whether this was honest admiration or whether it was merely an effort to encourage his talent I do not know.

She did her best to raise her boy well. She saw that he was neat, clean and as well fed as her purse would permit. Whenever he came to my consultation room this strange boy would sit among the other patients, awaiting his turn.

There was never anything seriously wrong. Possibly his tonsils would be inflamed. He would stand obedient and unflinching while I depressed his tongue and swabbed the trouble spots. Or, possibly, he would be suffering with a cold. I would treat him and send him on his way. Like any well-bred boy of fourteen or fifteen he would bow and thank me courteously.



Dr. Eduard Bloch, who was Jewish, treated Hitler as a young man, along with his mother and other members of the Hitler family. This picture of Dr. Bloch in his office in Linz was taken in 1938 on order of Martin Bormann for Hitler's "personal film file." The inscription reads: "The Führer often sat on the chair beside the desk." (Source: Bundesarchiv [Koblenz]. From: John Toland, *Adolf Hitler*.)

I, of course, know of the stomach trouble that beset him later in life, largely as a result of bad diet while working as a common laborer in Vienna. I cannot understand the many references to his lung trouble as a youth. I was the only doctor treating him during the period in which he is supposed to have suffered from this. My records show nothing of the sort. To be sure, he didn't have the rosy cheeks and the robust good health of most of the other youngsters; but at the same time he was not sickly.

At the *Realschule* young Adolf's work was anything but brilliant. As authority for this, I have the word of his former teacher, Dr. Karl Huemer, an old acquaintance of mine. I was Frau Huemer's physician. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler records that he was an indifferent student in most subjects, but that he loved history. This agrees with the recollections of Professor Huemer.

Desiring additional training in painting, Hitler decided he would go to Vienna to study at the Academy. This was a momentous decision for a member of a poor family. His mother worried about how he would get along. I understand that she even suggested pinching the family budget a little tighter to enable her to send him a tiny allowance. Credit to the boy, he refused. He even went further: he signed his minute inheritance over to his sisters. He was eighteen at the time.

I am not sure of the exact details of what happened on that trip to Vienna. Some contend that he was not admitted to the Academy because of his unsatisfactory art work. Others accept Hitler's statement that his rejection was due to his failure to graduate from the *Realschule* – the equivalent of an American high school. In any case he was home again within a few weeks. It was later in this year – 1908 [1907, according to some sources] – that it became my duty to give Hitler what was perhaps the saddest news of his life.

One day Frau Hitler came to visit me during my morning office hours. She complained of a pain in her chest. She spoke in a quiet, hushed voice; almost a whisper. The pain, she said, had been great; enough to keep her awake nights on end. She had been busy with her household so had neglected to seek medical aid. Besides, she thought the pain would pass away. When a physician hears such a story he almost automatically thinks of cancer. An examination showed that Frau Hitler had an extensive tumor of the breast. I did not tell her of my diagnosis.

The Family Decides

I summoned the children to my office next day and stated the case frankly. Their mother, I told them, was a gravely ill woman. A malignant tumor is serious enough today, but it was even more serious thirty years ago. Surgical techniques were not so advanced and knowledge of cancer not so extensive.

Without surgery, I explained, there was absolutely no hope of recovery. Even with surgery there was but the slightest chance that she would live. In family council they must decide what was to be done.

Adolf Hitler's reaction to this news was touching. His long, sallow face was contorted. Tears flowed from his eyes. Did his mother, he asked, have no chance? Only then did I realize the magnitude of the attachment that existed between mother and son. I explained that she did have a chance; but a small one. Even this shred of hope gave him some comfort.

The children carried my message to their mother. She accepted the verdict as I was sure she would – with fortitude. Deeply religious, she assumed that her fate was God's will. It would never have occurred to her to complain. She would submit to the operation as soon as I could make preparations.

I explained the case to Dr. Karl Urban, the chief of the surgical staff at the Hospital of the Sisters of Mercy in Linz. Urban was one of the best-known surgeons in Upper Austria. He was – and is – a generous man, a credit to his profession. He willingly agreed to undertake the operation on any basis I suggested. After examination he concurred in my belief that Frau Hitler had very little chance of surviving but that surgery offered the only hope.

It is interesting to note what happened to this generous man nearly three decades later – after *Anschluss* [union] with Germany. Because of his political connections he was forced to abandon his position at the hospital. His son, who pioneered in brain surgery, was likewise forced from several offices.

Frau Hitler arrived at the hospital one evening in the early summer of 1908 [1907?]. I do not have the exact date, for my records of the case were placed in the archives of the Nazi party in Munich. In any case, Frau Hitler spent the night in the hospital and was operated on the following morning. At the

request of this gentle, harried soul I remained beside the operating table while Dr. Urban and his assistant performed the surgery.

Two hours later I drove in my carriage across the Danube to the little house at No. 9 Bluetenstrasse, in the section of the city known as Urfahr. There the children awaited me.

The girls received the word I brought with calm and reserve. The face of the boy was streaked with tears, and his eyes were tired and red. He listened until I had finished speaking. He has but one question. In a choked voice he asked: "Does my mother suffer?"

Hitler's Worst Moment

As weeks and months passed after the operation Frau Hitler's strength began visibly to fail. At most she could be out of bed for an hour or two a day. During this period Adolf spent most of his time around the house, to which his mother had returned.

He slept in the tiny bedroom adjoining that of his mother so that he could be summoned at any time during the night. During the day he hovered about the large bed in which she lay.

In illness such as that suffered by Frau Hitler, there is usually a great amount of pain. She bore her burden well; unflinching and uncomplaining. But it seemed to torture her son. An anguished grimace would come over him when he saw pain contract her face. There was little that could be done. An injection of morphine from time to time would give temporary relief; but nothing lasting. Yet Adolf seemed enormously grateful even for these short periods of release.

I shall never forget Klara Hitler during those days. She was forty-eight at the time; tall, slender and rather handsome, yet wasted by disease. She was soft-spoken, patient; more concerned about what would happen to her family than she was about her approaching death. She made no secret of these worries; or about the fact that most of her thoughts were for her son. "Adolf is still so young," she said repeatedly.

On the day of December 20, 1908 [or 1907], I made two calls. The end was approaching and I wanted this good woman to be as comfortable as I could make her. I didn't know whether she would live another week, or another month; or whether death would come in a matter of hours.

So, the word that Angela Hitler brought me the following morning came as no surprise. Her mother had died quietly in the night. The children had decided not to disturb me, knowing that their mother was beyond all medical aid. But, she asked, could I come now? Someone in an official position would have to sign the death certificate. I put on my coat and drove with her to the grief-stricken cottage.

The postmaster's widow, their closest friend, was with the children, having more or less taken charge of things. Adolf, his face showing the weariness of a sleepless night, sat beside his mother. In order to preserve a last impression, he had sketched her as she lay on her deathbed.

I sat with the family for a while, trying to ease their grief. I explained that in this case death had been a savior. They understood.

In the practice of my profession it is natural that I should have witnessed many scenes such as this one, yet none of them left me with quite the same impression. In all my career I have never seen anyone so prostrate with grief as Adolf Hitler.

I did not attend Klara Hitler's funeral, which was held on Christmas Eve. The body was taken from Urfahr to Leonding, only a few miles distant. Klara Hitler was buried beside her husband in the Catholic cemetery, behind the small, yellow stucco church. After the others -- the girls, and the postmaster's widow -- had left, Adolf remained behind; unable to tear himself away from the freshly filled grave.

And so this gaunt, pale young man stood alone in the cold. Alone with his thoughts on Christmas Eve while the rest of the world was gay and happy.

A few days after the funeral the family came to my office. They wished to thank me for the help I had given them. There was Paula, fair and stocky; Angela, slender, pretty but rather anemic; Klara and Adolf. The girls spoke what was in their hearts while Adolf remained silent. I recall this particular scene as vividly as I might recall something that took place last week.

Adolf wore a dark suit and a loosely knotted cravat. Then, as now, a shock of hair tumbled over his forehead. His eyes were on the floor while his sisters were talking. Then came his turn. He stepped forward and took my hand. Looking into my eyes, he said: "I shall be grateful to you forever." That was all. Then he bowed. I wonder if today he recalls this scene. I am quite sure that he does, for in a sparing sense Adolf Hitler had kept to his promise of gratitude. Favors were granted me which I feel sure were accorded no other Jew in all Germany or Austria.

Part II

Almost immediately after his mother's funeral Hitler left for Vienna, to attempt once more a career as an artist. His growth to manhood had been a painful experience for this boy who lived within himself. But ever more trying days were coming. Poor as the family was, he had at least been assured food and shelter while living at home. This couldn't be said of the days in Vienna. Hitler was entirely engrossed with the business of keeping body and soul together.

We all know something of his life there – how he worked as a hodcarrier on building-construction jobs until workmen threatened to push him off a scaffold. And we know that he shoveled snow and took any other job he could find. During this period, for three years in fact, Hitler lived in a man's hostel, the equivalent of a flophouse in any large American city. It was here that he began to dream of a world remade to his pattern.

While living in the hostel, surrounded by the human dregs of the large city, Hitler says, "I became dissatisfied with myself for the first time in my life." This dissatisfaction with himself was followed by dissatisfaction with everything about him – and the desire to alter things to his own liking.

The vitriol of hate began to creep through his body. The grim realities of the life he lived encouraged him to hate the government, labor unions, the very men he lived with. But he had not yet begun to hate the Jews.

During this period he took time out to send me a penny postcard. On the back was a message: "From Vienna I send you my greetings. Yours, always faithfully, Adolf Hitler." It was a small thing, yet I appreciated it. I had spent a great deal of time treating the Hitler family and it was nice to know that this effort on my part had not been forgotten.

Official Nazi publications also record that I received one of Hitler's paintings – a small landscape. If I did I am not aware of it. But it is quite possible that he sent me one and that I have forgotten the matter. In Austria patients frequently send paintings or other gifts to their physicians as a mark of gratitude. Even now I have half a dozen of these oils and water colors which I have saved; but none painted by Hitler among them.



Hitler's mother, Klara, at about the time of her marriage in 1885.

I did, however, preserve one piece of Hitler's art work. This came during the period in Vienna when he was painting post cards, posters, etc., making enough money to support himself. This was the one time in his life that Hitler was able to make successful use of his talent.

He would paint these cards and dry them in front of a hot fire, which would give them a rather pleasing antique quality. Then other inmates of the hostel would peddle them. Today in Germany the few remaining samples of this work are more highly prized and sought after than the works of Picasso, Gauguin and Cézanne!

Hitler sent me one of these cards. It showed a hooded Capuchin monk hoisting a glass of bubbling champagne. Under the picture was a caption: "Prosit Neujahr – A toast to the New Year." On the reverse side he had written a message: "The Hitler family sends you the best wishes for a Happy New Year. In everlasting thankfulness, Adolf Hitler."

Why I put these cards aside to be saved, I do not know. Possibly it was because of the impression made upon me by that unhappy boy. Even today I cannot help thinking of him in terms of his grief and not in terms of what he has done to the world.

Those postal cards had a curious history. They indicated the extent to which Hitler has captured the imagination of some people. A rich Viennese industrialist – I do not know his name because he dealt through an intermediary – later made me an astonishing offer. He wanted to buy those two cards and was willing to pay 20,000 marks for them! I rejected the offer on the ground that I could not ethically make such a sale.

There is still another story in those two cards. Seventeen days after the collapse of the Schuschnigg government and the occupation of Austria by German troops, an agent of the Gestapo called at my home. At the time I was making a professional call, but my wife received him.

'Retained for Safekeeping'

"I am informed," he said, "that you have some souvenirs of the Fuehrer. I should like to see them." Acting sensibly, my wife made no protest. She didn't wish to have her home torn apart as so many Jewish homes had been. She found the two cards and handed them over. The agent scribbled a receipt which read: "Certificate for the safekeeping of two post cards (one of them painted by the hand of Adolf Hitler) confiscated in the house of Dr. Eduard Bloch." It was signed by the agent, named Groemer, who was previously unknown to us. He said I was to come to headquarters the following morning.

Almost as soon as the Nazis entered the city the Gestapo took over the small hotel in Gesellenhausstrasse formally patronized by traveling clergymen. I went to this place and was received almost immediately. I was greeted courteously by Dr. Rasch, head of the local bureau. I asked him why these bits of property had been taken.

Those were busy days for the Gestapo. There were many things to be looked after in a town of 120,000 people. It developed that Dr. Rasch was not familiar with my case. He asked if I were under suspicion for any political activity unfavorable to the Nazis. I replied that I was not; that I was a professional man with no political connections.

Apparently as an afterthought, he asked if I were a non-Aryan. I answered without compromise: "I am a 100 percent Jew." The change that came over him was instantaneous. Previously he had been businesslike but courteous. Now he became distant.

The cards, he said, would be retained for safekeeping. Then he dismissed me, neither rising nor shaking hands as he had when I entered. So far as I know the cards are still in the hands of the Gestapo. I never saw them again.

When he left for Vienna, Adolf Hitler was destined to disappear from our lives for a great many years. He had no friends in Linz to whom he might return to visit and few with whom he might exchange correspondence. So, it was much later that we learned of his wretched poverty on those days, and of his subsequent moving to Munich in 1912 [actually, in May 1913].

No news came back of the way in which he fell on his knees and thanked God when war was declared in 1914; and no news of his war service as a corporal with the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry. We heard nothing of his being wounded and gassed. Not until the beginning of his political career in 1920 were we again to get news of this quiet, polite boy who grew up among us.

Could This Be Adolf?

Occasionally the local newspapers would run items about the group of political supporters that Hitler was gathering about himself in Munich; stories of their hatred of the Jews, of the Versailles Peace, of nearly everything else. But no particular importance was attached to these activities. Not until twenty people died in the beer-hall putsch of November 8, 1923, did Hitler achieve local notoriety. Was it possible, I asked myself, that the man behind these things was the quiet boy I had known -- the son of the gentle Klara Hitler?

Eventually even the mention of Hitler's name in the Austrian press was prohibited; still we continued to get word-of-mouth news of our former townsman: stories of the persecutions he had launched; of German rearmament; of war to come. This smuggled news reached responsive ears. A local Nazi party sprang up.

In theory such a party could not exist; it had been outlawed by the government. In practice authorities gave it their blessings. Denied uniforms, local Nazis adopted methods of identifying

themselves to everyone. They wore white stockings. On their coats they wore a small wild flower, very much like the American daisy, and at Christmas time they burned blue candles in their homes.

We all knew these things, but nothing was done. From time to time local authorities would find a Nazi flag on Klara Hitler's grave in Leonding, and would remove it without ceremony. Still, the gathering storm in Germany seemed remote. It was quite a while before I got any firsthand word from Adolf Hitler. Then, in 1937, a number of local Nazis attended the party conference at Nuremberg. After the conference Hitler invited several of these people to come with him to his mountain villa at Berchtesgaden. The Fuehrer asked for news of Linz. How was the town? Were people there supporting him? He asked for news of me. Was I still alive, still practicing? Then he made a statement irritating to local Nazis. "Dr. Bloch," said Hitler, "is an *Edeljude* – a noble Jew. If all Jews were like him, there would be no Jewish question." It was strange, and in a way flattering, that Adolf Hitler could see good in at least one member of my race.

It is curious now to look back on the feeling of security that we had by virtue of living on the right side of an imaginary line, the international boundary. Surely Germany would not chance invading Austria. France was friendly. Occupation of Austria would be inimical to the interests of Italy. Oh, but we were blind, in those days! Then we were caught up in a breathless rush of events. It was with hope that we read of [Austrian chancellor] Schuschnigg's trip to Berchtesgaden; his plebiscite; his inclusion of Seyss-Inquart in his cabinet. Possibly we would ride through this crisis untouched. But hope was doomed to death within a very few hours. As soon as Seyss-Inquart was taken into the cabinet, buttons sprouted in every lapel: "One People, One Realm, One Leader."

While Austria Died

On Friday, March 11, 1938, the Vienna radio was broadcasting a program of light music. It was 7:45 at night. Suddenly the announcer broke in. The chancellor would speak. Schuschnigg came on the air and said that to prevent bloodshed he was capitulating to the wishes of Hitler. The frontiers would be opened, he ended his address with the words: "*Gott schütze Oesterreich*" – may God protect Austria. Hitler was coming home to Linz.

In the sleepless days that followed we clung to our radios. Troops were pouring over the border at Passau, Kufstein, Mittenwalde and elsewhere. Hitler himself was crossing the Inn River at Braunau, his birthplace. Breathlessly, the announcer told us the story of the march. The Fuehrer himself would pause in Linz. The town went mad with joy. The reader should have no doubts about the popularity of *Anschluss* with Germany. The people favored it. They greeted the onrushing tide of German troops with flowers, cheers and songs. Church bells rang. Austrian troops and police fraternized with the invaders and there was general rejoicing.

The public square in Linz, a block from my home, was a turmoil. All afternoon it rang with the Horst Wessel song and *Deutschland über Alles*. Planes droned overhead, and advance units of the German army were given deafening cheers. Finally the radio announced that Hitler was in Linz.

Advance instructions had been given to the townspeople. All windows along the procession route were to be closed. Each should be lighted. I stood at the window of my home facing Landstrasse. Hitler would pass before me.

The Hero Returns

Soon the procession arrived – the great, black Mercedes car, a six-wheeled affair, flanked by motorcycles. The frail boy I had treated so often, and whom I had not seen for thirty years – stood in the car. I had accorded him only kindness; what was he now to do to the people I loved? I peered over the heads of the crowd at Adolf Hitler.

It was a moment of tense excitement. For years Hitler had been denied the right to visit the country of his birth. Now that country belonged to him. The elation that he felt was written on his features. He smiled, waved, gave the Nazi salute to the people that crowded the street. Then, for a moment he glanced up at my window. I doubt that he saw me, but he must have had a moment of reflection. Here was the home of the *Edeljude* who had diagnosed his mother's fatal cancer; here was the consultation room of the man who had treated his sisters; here was the place he had gone as a boy to have his minor ailments attended.

It was a brief moment. Then the procession was gone. It moved slowly into the town square – once Franz Josef Platz, soon to be renamed Adolf Hitler Platz. He spoke from the balcony of the town hall. I listened on the radio. Historic words: Germany and Austria were now one.

Hitler established himself in the Weinzing Hotel, particularly requesting an apartment with a view of the Poestling Mountain. This scene had been visible from the windows of the modest apartment where he spent his boyhood.

The following day he called in a few old acquaintances: Oberhammer, a local party functionary; Kubitschek [Kubizek], the musician; Liedel, the watchmaker; Dr. Huemer, his former history teacher. It was understandable that he couldn't ask me, a Jew, to such a meeting; yet he did inquire after me. For a while I thought of asking for an audience, then decided this would be unwise.

Hitler arrived Saturday evening. Sunday he visited his mother's grave, and reviewed local Nazis as they marched before him. Not equipped with uniforms, they wore knickerbockers, ski pants or leather shorts. On Monday Hitler departed for Vienna.

Soon we were brought to a sharp realization of how different things were to be. There were 700 Jews in Linz. Shops, homes and offices of all these people were marked with the yellow-paper banners now visible throughout Germany, *JUDE* – Jew.

The first suggestion that I was to receive special favors came one day when the local Gestapo telephoned. I was to remove the yellow signs from my office and home. Then a second thing happened: My landlord, an Aryan, went to Gestapo headquarters to ask if I were to be allowed to remain in my apartment. "We wouldn't dare touch that matter," he was told. "It will be handled by Berlin." Hitler, apparently, had remembered. Then something happened that made me doubt.

For no reason whatsoever my son-in-law, a young physician, was jailed. No one was allowed to see him, and we received no news of him. My daughter went to the Gestapo. "Would the Leader like to know that the son-in-law of his old physician had been sent to prison?" she asked. She was treated rudely and brusquely for her temerity. Hadn't the signs been removed from her father's house? Wasn't that enough? Yet her visit must have had some effect. Within three weeks her husband was released.

My practice, which I believe was one of the largest in Linz, had begun to dwindle as long as a year before the arrival of Hitler. In this I might have seen a portent of things to come. Faithful older patients were quite frank in their explanations. The hatred preached by the Nazis was taking hold with the younger people. They would no longer patronize a Jew.



A sketch of the 16-year-old Hitler, drawn by a schoolmate.

By decree, my active practice was limited to Jewish patients. This was another way of saying that I was to cease work altogether. For plans were in the making for ridding the town of all Jews. On November 10, 1938, the ruling was issued that all Jews were to leave Linz within forty-eight hours. They were to go to Vienna. The shock that attended this edict may be imagined. People who had lived all their lives in Linz were to sell their property, pack and depart in the space of two days.

I called at the Gestapo. Was I to leave? I was informed that an exception had been made in my case. I could remain. My daughter and her husband? Since they had already signified their intention of emigrating to America, they also could stay. But they would have to vacate their house. If there was room in my apartment they would be permitted to move there.

No More Favors

After thirty-seven years of active work my practice was at an end. I was permitted to treat only Jews. After the evacuation order there were but seven members of this race left in Linz. All were over eighty years of age.

It is understandable that my daughter and her husband would wish to take their life savings with them when they departed for America. So would I when my turn came to depart. Getting any local ruling on such a matter was out of the question. I knew that I couldn't see Adolf Hitler. Yet I felt that if I could get a message to him he would perhaps give us some help.

If Hitler himself was inaccessible perhaps one of his sisters would aid us. Klara was the nearest; she lived in Vienna. Her husband had died and she lived alone in a modest apartment in a quiet residential district. Plans were made for my daughter, Gertrude, to make the trip to Vienna to see her. She went to the apartment, knocked, but got no answer. Yet she was sure that there was someone at home.

She sought the aid of a neighbor. Frau Wolf – Klara Hitler – received no one, the neighbor said, except a few intimate friends. But this kind woman agreed to carry a message and report Frau Wolf's reply. My daughter waited. Soon the answer came back. Frau Wolf sent greetings and would do whatever she could. By good fortune Hitler was in Vienna that night for one of his frequent but unheralded visits to the opera. Frau Wolf saw him and, I feel sure, gave him the message. But no exception was made in our case. When our turn came we were forced to go penniless, like so many thousands of others.

How has Hitler treated an old friend – one who cared for his family with patience, consideration and charity? Let's sum up the favors:

I don't believe that another Jew in all Austria was allowed to keep his passport. No J was stamped on my ration card, once food became scarce. This was most helpful because Jews today are allowed to shop only during restricted hours which are often inconvenient. Without the J on my card I could buy at any time. I was even given a ration card for clothes – something generally denied Jews.

If my relations with the Gestapo were not precisely cordial, I at least didn't suffer at their hands as did so many others. I was told on good authority, and I can well believe it, that the bureau in Linz had received special instructions from the chancellery in Berlin that I was to be accorded any reasonable favor.

It is possible, but unlikely, that my war record was particularly responsible for these small considerations. During the war I had charge of a 1,000-bed military hospital, and my wife supervised welfare work among the sick. I was twice decorated for this service.

Hitler Rebuilds His Home City

Hitler still regards Linz as his true home, and the changes he has wrought are astonishing. The once quiet, sleepy town had been transformed by its "godfather" – an honorary title particularly dear to Hitler. Whole blocks of old houses have been pulled down to make way for modern apartment houses; thereby causing an acute but temporary housing shortage. A new theater has gone up and a new bridge has been built over the Danube. The bridge, according to local legend, was designed by Hitler himself and plans were already completed at the time of *Anschluss*. The vast Hermann Goering Iron Works, built in the past two years, is just starting operations. To carry on this program of reconstruction whole trainloads of laborers have been imported: Czechs, Poles, Belgians.

Hitler has visited the city twice since the *Anschluss*, once at the time of the election which was to approve union with Germany; a second time secretly to see how reconstruction of the town was progressing. Each time had stayed at the Weininger Hotel.

On the second visit the proprietor of the hotel was informed that Hitler's presence in town was not to be announced; that he would make his inspection tour in the morning. Delighted at having such an important personage in his house, the proprietor could not resist boasting. He telephoned several friends to give them the news. For this breach of discipline he paid heavily. His hotel was confiscated.

Many times I have been approached by Hitler biographers for notes on his youth. In most instances I have refused to speak. But I did talk to one of these men. He was a pleasant middle-aged gentleman from Vienna, who came from the government department headed by Rudolf Hess, of the Nazi inner circle. He was writing an official biography. I gave him such details as I could recall, and my medical records which he subsequently sent to Nazi party headquarters in Munich. He stayed in Linz and Braunau for several weeks; then the project terminated abruptly. I was told he had been sent to the silence of the concentration camp. Why, I do not know.

When it finally became my turn to leave Linz for America I knew that it would be impossible for me to take my savings with me. But the Gestapo had one more favor for me. I was to be allowed to take sixteen marks from the country instead of the customary ten!

The Nazi organization of physicians gave me a letter, of what value I do not know, which states that I was "worthy of recommendation." It went on to say that, because of my "character, medical

knowledge and readiness to help the sick," I had won "the appreciation and esteem of my fellow men."

A party official suggested that I was expected to show some gratitude for all these favors. Perhaps a letter to the Fuehrer? Before I left Linz on a cold, foggy November morning, I wrote it. I wonder if it was ever received. It read:

Your Excellency:

Before passing the border I want to express my thanks for the protection which I have received. In material poverty I am now leaving the town where I have lived for forty-one years; but I leave conscious of having lived in the most exact fulfillment of my duty. At sixty-nine I will start my life anew in a strange country where my daughter is working hard to support her family.

Yours faithfully,
Eduard Bloch

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For Further Reading

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